

## Going Nowhere

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# **Going Nowhere**

by Anonymous

## Summary

The day has come for Tommy to move on to his next foster family and Wilbur has no idea how he's going to say goodbye, fortunately, after meeting Phil and his son, Techno, he may not have to.

~\*~

A companion story for Guitar Strings and Keyrings from Wilbur's pov set during chapter 1.

## Notes

Hello! I'm back with another Wilbur pov oneshot for Guitar Strings and Keyrings! Like the others, it is a companion story for '[Guitar Strings and Keyrings are What it Takes to Build a Home](#)' and won't make much sense without reading the first fic in the [series](#).

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Wilbur knew that leaving packing to the last minute wasn't a good idea. They'd been moved around often enough that they were more than familiar with how long it took to get things organized before they'd be ushered into a car and taken far away again.

They didn't have much but it was important to take inventory of what they did have and what they needed as well as figuring out a way to hide the things that may get them in trouble. One of their houses confiscated their stash of snacks and it took them months to build it back up again. Those foster parents in particular liked to withhold food as a punishment, which only made the situation worse and Wilbur had resorted to portioning up his lunch at school and saving some so Tommy had something to eat should they get in trouble at home. It was far from the worst house they had ended up in but it would have been avoidable had they managed to hide the food just a little bit better and this time Wilbur didn't want to take any risks.

In the days leading up to when Tommy would leave, Wilbur had tried to get him to work on getting his things together but the kid was making a point of giving Wilbur as much trouble as possible. It lasted up until the day Tommy was set to leave and they couldn't put it off anymore.

If Tommy were to get a shot at having a decent future, it would likely be without Wilbur by his side.

It was a hard pill to swallow and the thought of not being there to personally oversee Tommy's safety was terrifying, not that he'd ever tell the kid that, Wilbur knew he had to be scared already.

He had to trust a complete stranger with his little brother's wellbeing and while Wilbur wanted to be able to, he knew that it was less than realistic. They had been hurt so many times in the past that Wilbur just couldn't believe there any homes out there that could understand Tommy as more than a problem child – as a product of the system.

It felt like a last warning when their social worker had told them of a single father who would be willing to take Tommy in for a little while.

He had experience fostering and didn't seem put off by the list of behavioural issues on Tommy's record, which in Wilbur's experience, was already a red flag. It suggested that this man – Phil – thought he could change Tommy, that he saw the kid as somebody to be made an example of. Living, breathing proof that even the most unruly kids could be reformed.

Tommy was given some time to think it over – which implied more autonomy than they were actually given. In reality, Tommy would be sent away whether he wanted to go or not and the kid made it more than apparent that he did not want to go.

"Keep your head down and stay out of trouble, okay?" Wilbur told him on their last night while Tommy lay in bed pretending to sleep.

"I'm not going," he heard as the muttered response.

"Tommy, please. You need a real shot at a future – you won't get that here. Give this Phil guy a few days. If he tries to hit you, make sure you hit him first, okay?" Wilbur's tone was light, joking but also carried a note of truth with it. If he wasn't there to protect Tommy then he had to make sure the kid got out unscathed on his own, even if it meant he was returned to the group home with another account of violence on his record.

"Whatever," Tommy mumbled into his pillow and Wilbur knew the conversation was over.

Tommy hadn't quite gotten over it the following day when Wilbur brought up that they really did have to pack his bags before Phil arrived to pick him up.

Wilbur ended up sorting most of Tommy's belongings while the kid wandered around their bedroom, avoiding eye contact and trying to appear busy. Wilbur didn't push the matter, he knew that Tommy was struggling enough and the last thing he needed was the extra stress of making sure he was ready to move on without his older brother.

He had already set much of Tommy's belongings into his duffle bag and at this point, Wilbur knew he was stalling for time just as much as Tommy was.

He had been up early getting him ready. It was far from how Wilbur had wanted to spend his morning but he knew that sitting around feeling sorry for them both would only make matters worse and he couldn't take laying in bed anymore, unable to sleep, overcome with a nauseating combination of dread, fear and anticipation. It never got any easier when one of them was sent to another home, even for a few days, and as much as Wilbur wanted to shut the door and not let anyone take his little brother away, he forced himself into careful composure. There would be time to break down after Tommy was gone and he was left alone again but until then he had to hold it together – it would be selfish to ruin Tommy's chances of actually getting out of the group home because Wilbur would miss him.

He had to put his little brother first, even if the consequences left him devastated.

Wilbur pulled one of his own jumpers out of their wardrobe. He wasn't sure when he had acquired it, only that it was one that Tommy had taken to stealing every now and then when he was scared or sad but unwilling to talk about it.

He stared at it for a long moment, swallowed around the lump in his throat and held the jumper up. "Is this yours or mine?"

Tommy looked up and stared at it for a moment. His eyes seemed distant and though they rested on the worn blue fabric they wouldn't look past it and meet Wilbur's gaze.

He immediately caught on to the actual question Wilbur was asking him: *Do you want to take this with you?*

He hesitated for a moment and then replied, "mine."

*Yes.*

Wilbur nodded and folded the jumper neatly, slipping a selection of chocolate and energy bars down its front before placing it in Tommy's bag. He wasn't sure how thorough of an inspection Tommy's new foster father would conduct on the kid's belongings but Wilbur hoped that if he checked Tommy's bag, it would only be a quick glance. There was nothing worse than the families that would shake out every single piece of clothing in front of them and set aside what they deemed inappropriate.

Wilbur looked over the remaining packets of food he had left and placed some more into the bags side pockets while Tommy wasn't looking. The kid wouldn't take all the food from their stash no matter how much Wilbur insisted but he wanted Tommy to leave with as much as he could get away with. Wilbur was sick with worry that Tommy would be left to go hungry and sneaking into the kitchen to raid the cupboards was always incredibly risky, it was best to avoid it where possible and Wilbur wanted to give Tommy the best chance possible at staying out of trouble.

One he was satisfied that he'd be sending Tommy off with every little advantage he could, he zipped the bag shut and turned to his brother once again.

"Is there anything else you need?" He uttered softly into the silence between them.

Tommy didn't say anything. He didn't spin around to meet Wilbur's gaze or grunt in reply.

If Wilbur didn't know him any better, he may have thought the kid didn't hear him but the way he tensed spoke for itself. His back straightened and his shoulders raised ever so slightly.

"Tommy?" He prompted and like a switch had been flipped, the kid curled in on himself, shaking slightly as he hung his head.

Wilbur sighed quietly and crossed the small distance between them. He very carefully brought a hand down on Tommy's shoulder, hesitant, careful, watching for if he sank into the touch or drew away from it. It took a minute for Tommy to register the contact but when he did he shifted and Wilbur lifted his hand on instinct only for Tommy to turn towards him and fall against his chest.

He was crying, with tears that fell down his cheeks as barely any sound escaped his lips. The sight drove a knife directly through Wilbur's heart. It was almost instinctual at this point that they smother their sobs in case someone would pass by their room and hurt them for being noisy or annoying.

Tommy was clever. He knew how to be quiet, how to hide when trouble went looking for him but at the end of the day Wilbur knew that Tommy was still only a child. He lashed out, let emotions get the better of him and sometimes spoke without thinking. Wilbur looked down at Tommy and could only hope that the man he ended up with was merciful. He brought his arms up to wrap around his brother, gently at first but growing tighter, desperate as he wondered when he'd next get to see him. Would Tommy be covered in bruises or skinnier than he already was?

Wilbur pushed the thought away quickly before he broke down too. He couldn't. Not yet. He had to be brave for Tommy's sake.

Wilbur was dragged from his thoughts by a knocking at the front door. Tommy's new family was here to pick him up. Neither one of them said anything but Wilbur could feel his little brother's arms tighten around him, clutching to his jumper like it was a lifeline.

"Tommy..." Wilbur murmured again the kid's blonde curls. "It's time to go..."

Tommy whimpered and shook his head, refusing to pull away from where he had nestled against Wilbur's chest.

They listened to the sounds of wooden floorboards creaking and the echo of a pair of voices – one was high-pitched and rang out loud, it was their care worker's, the other was deeper, a rumble that was harder to make out. It was the voice of Tommy's foster father.

"At least you only have to deal with one of them," Wilbur thought aloud. "The houses with single parents are usually easier."

He wasn't sure if the words were any comfort at all to Tommy. The kid didn't seem to react, he just stood still as Wilbur held him tightly.

"Wish you could come..."

Wilbur huffed a little, humourless laugh. "I wish I could go with you too but for now you've got to hang on for me, okay? Don't do anything stupid. Stay out of trouble. Keep your head down and don't draw attention to yourself."

Tommy didn't reply and Wilbur gave squeezed him tighter to prompt him into talking.

"Tommy?"

"Hmm."

"Look after yourself, okay? You have to promise me that."

"Whatever," Tommy mumbled into the fabric of his brother's jumper and Wilbur finally pulled away to look him in the eyes.

"I'm being serious. You know how to stay safe – we've been through this time and time again."

"*Together.* We do this together, not- not just *me* on my own."

"I know," Wilbur sighed and took a breath, willed himself to hold it together just a little longer. "But you have to be brave for me, okay? And- and if- Wilbur swallowed around the lump in his throat. "If he goes to hit you, make sure you hit him back *harder* and then run. Hide and stay really quiet, don't let him find you. You're not gonna give the bastard the satisfaction of a fight."

"Of course not," Tommy seemed offended at the idea and Wilbur nodded.

There was the sound of footsteps on stairs, heavier than any of the kids who lived there. The two of them knew it was their care worker. Tommy flinched back and bit his lip to suppress a whine and Wilbur straightened. He took in a deep breath as he watched their doorhandle turn. She didn't knock, likely already aware that neither Wilbur or Tommy would let her in by choice.

"Tommy?" She poked her head inside. "Oh you're all packed, that's good. Let's go downstairs and meet your new foster family, hmm?"

Tommy didn't move. He just stared back, eyes wet and body alarmingly still. Wilbur wasn't sure he was breathing.

"It'll be okay," Wilbur whispered and nudged him forward slightly. Tommy went easily, barely offered any resistance at all. He looked back over his shoulder at Wilbur but before he could get a word out, he was ushered out of the door and it was shut with a click behind him.

Just like that, Tommy was gone.

It had happened so quickly. One moment, Wilbur could reach out and touch him and then the next, it was as if he were already miles away.

The room spun and Wilbur felt sick. He sank to the ground, barely felt the carpet beneath his hands as he pushed himself back so that he leaned against the wall.

He took in a shaky gasping breath and blinked tears away. The walls were so thin and he didn't want to risk Tommy hearing him. There was no way he'd let himself ruin this for his little brother.

It was so easy to think of all the things that could go wrong. Of all the ways Tommy could be hurt, or starved, or neglected. Wilbur wouldn't even be there to deflect attention, he wouldn't even know it was happening.

All they had been told about the man who had agreed to take on Tommy was that he was in his 30s, unmarried and lived very far from town.

The location of his house had been described as scenic and calming but both Wilbur and Tommy knew better than that, it was *isolating*. There was no way Tommy could find his way back to the group home and there was nowhere for him to run if things went wrong.

Wilbur gasped around a breath of air.

God, if he found out that man raised his hand against Tommy, Wilbur would find a way there and kill him personally.

Tommy was a clever kid. He was resourceful and could be quiet when sneaking around. He was a quick learner and did as Wilbur told him without much fuss. Over their time together, Wilbur had taught Tommy well enough how to survive and avoid trouble but each new house was unpredictable and while they often followed patterns there were always exceptions – anomalies that neither one of them had any sort of control over.

He tried to convince himself it wasn't worth thinking about. That nothing had even happened yet, he should calm down, play his guitar to fill the awful silence of their – no, *Wilbur's* – bedroom but as he brought his hand up, he realised that it was shaking.

Wilbur choked around a sob. He pressed a trembling hand to his mouth to stifle the whine that clawed its way up his throat and used the other one to wipe his eyes before any tears could fall.

*Tommy was better off on his own.*

Wilbur would only hold him back and he deserved a real chance at getting away from the hell that was their group home. Tommy wouldn't leave him behind, he was too good for that, so Wilbur would have to cut the kid free himself.

It hurt. It was agony but he pushed himself back up, onto his feet and breathed deeply until he had composed himself. With the constant noise from the other children, Wilbur was fortunately spared from having to listen to the perfunctory conversation where Tommy was introduced to his new father and ushered away.

Wilbur could pretend that Tommy was happy to go, that he was excited to join a new school and make actual friends. They'd be the good sort, not ones that picked on him or left him out because he hadn't been present at the beginning of term. He'd be just fine without Wilbur there, maybe he'd even forget about him altogether.

Wilbur felt the corners of his eyes prick with tears again but he blinked them away quickly.

He was fine. Tommy was fine. He didn't have to-

“Wilbur!” His name rang out and echoed up the staircase. It was distinct and clear despite the constant noise of the group home. “Can you come here for a minute?”

He was out of their – his, fuck, *his* bedroom and down the stairs in a heartbeat.

Of course things weren't going to go smoothly – Tommy was terrified and while Wilbur didn't know exactly what had been said to his little brother, he doubted that it was anything even remotely comforting. He was tired of people treating Tommy like he was an enigma, he was just a scared kid but nobody seemed interested in actually getting to know him past the defensive front he put up.

He took a breath and set his hand on the handle, found that the door was already slightly ajar and pushed it open all the way so he could step inside.

Wilbur's throat felt dry but he forced himself to speak regardless. “You wanted to see me?”

His eyes darted about the room and locked onto Tommy. God, the kid looked worse than Wilbur had imagined and it took all his strength not to pull his brother against his chest and demand they all fuck off and leave the kid alone.

At least Tommy was unharmed, not that Wilbur was particularly surprised. He'd been in the system long enough to know that foster parents wouldn't lash out immediately. They would

sit there in front of the care worker, all sickeningly sweet smiles, packed full of faux compassion as they quietly took note of every slight misdemeanour until they had a complete list to use against kids the minute they got home.

Phil didn't seem any different. His brows were knit together in concern as he looked between the brothers.

Wilbur shivered, he didn't buy it at all and found himself terrified to think how the man would discipline Tommy for making this whole ordeal difficult.

But Wilbur knew that Tommy wasn't trying to cause trouble. He was just scared, so unbelievably scared. *Why couldn't they see that? Didn't they care? Couldn't Tommy's new foster father afford him a little bit of mercy, just this once while he was having to say goodbye?*

Then Wilbur realised that there was another kid in the room, sitting very still and very quiet in the chair beside Phil's. Wilbur didn't know that there'd be another kid, nobody had even mentioned Phil having a son-

Wilbur felt his heart hammering inside his chest as he assessed the kid opposite him. He decided there and then that he *really* didn't like the look of Phil's son.

The kid was definitely older than Tommy, likely Wilbur's year at school or the one above and though he was sitting down, Wilbur still noted the broadness across his chest and arms. The guy looked undoubtedly strong and Wilbur knew that if Phil's son decided to attack them it would definitely hurt. His brows were knit together and his face twisted up into a scowl, somewhere between angry and perturbed.

Wilbur breathed in deeply. He needed to find a way to deescalate the situation quickly. Panicking would only make things worse and Tommy had already worked himself up enough already. Wilbur recognised the frantic breathing, watery eyes and shaking in his hands right away, the signs that Tommy was on the verge of a panic attack. He didn't deal with them as often as Wilbur but it was far from the first time he had calmed Tommy down.

"Tommy here is just getting a bit upset about having to move and we were wondering if you could maybe help him out."

Wilbur nodded and finally shut the door behind him. It blocked out most of the noise of the other children but the thought of being shut in with Phil and his son left Wilbur uneasy.

The minute the door was shut and Wilbur turned to face his care worker's office again, he stumbled back as Tommy sprang for him. The kid pressed close against Wilbur's side, almost hiding behind him, like they were being yelled at and Tommy couldn't help but cower away.

"Tommy," Wilbur spoke as softly as he could. The first thing he needed to do was calm the kid down before he had chance to work himself up again. "What's wrong?"

"I *don't* want to go. They can't make me!"

Wilbur sighed and he leaned down to meet Tommy's gaze.

"You can't stay here. It's better if you go now and-"

"I am *not* going!" The kid's voice broke on the words and he bit his lip to fight back the wave of emotion as tears stung his eyes.

Wilbur winced. This really didn't look good. At worst, Phil could interpret it as Tommy being ungrateful for being offered a new home and the certainly wouldn't go down well later.

Wilbur spun around to glance between Phil and his son.

"I'm really sorry. He wants to go with you and he's really happy, it's just a bit scary at first." *Please understand. Please be sympathetic.* Wilbur heard Tommy whine and set a hand on his back placatingly as he continued. "Come on, Tommy, I'll come with you to grab your bag, okay?"

Wilbur didn't wait for a response before he lead Tommy out the door and closed it carefully behind them. It wasn't until it clicked shut that Wilbur let out a breath he didn't realise he had been holding in.

He looked over at Tommy and noticed the kid swaying uncertainly on his feet.

"Tommy?" He whispered quietly but before the kid could respond, his legs gave out beneath him and he pitched forward.

Wilbur caught him quickly and held the kid tight against his chest. "I've got you, you're okay, I've got you..." he mumbled. "We need to go, they'll get impatient. Can you walk on your own or do you want help?"

There was a beat of silence before Tommy replied. "No, I'm fine."

Wilbur reluctantly let him go and Tommy tentatively began his ascent up the stairs. Neither one of them said anything until they were back in the bedroom, there were too many kids around. It was impossible to think, let alone talk without fear of raising your voice over the noise and being overheard.

Wilbur made sure the door was firmly shut behind them before he spoke. "What's the son's name?"

Tommy blinked over at him as if startled out of his own thoughts. "Um, Techno, I think."

"Great," Wilbur uttered, sarcastic and angry as he grit his teeth to bite back a frustrated shout. Techno had glared at Tommy like he wanted nothing more than to use the kid as his own personal punching bag and Wilbur wouldn't even be there to stop him, he just had to hope Tommy was able to hide and wait it out. "Just fucking wonderful."

"What do you think of them?" Tommy asked quietly, though his expression was pained as if he dreaded Wilbur's answer.

Wilbur couldn't lie to him but his honest opinion would only send Tommy spiralling into another panic attack.

"I—" The words died in his throat. He breathed in deeply, "Don't piss Techno off..."

"Oh God," Tommy held his head in his hands.

"Please, Tommy, you *have* to be careful. Remember how to hide – use anything you can to block the door."

"Oh *God*," Tommy's voice sounded weak.

"Buy yourself time so you can get under the bed or to the back of the wardrobe."

"I'm going to *fucking die*." Tommy looked up and stared back at Wilbur, eyes wide and lip trembling as the gravity of his situation set in.

"No," Wilbur told him firmly. "No, you are going to be fine. You are going to get through this and when you see me again you can call me a bitch for worrying so much, okay?"

"Please don't make me go," Tommy shook his head, voice breaking on the last word.  
"They'll kill me."

"I don't have a say here – neither of us do."

"We can leave," Tommy looked at him suddenly as he shifted his weight from foot to foot, antsy and nervous with no outlet for the adrenaline coursing through his body. "We'll run. They won't find us and- and you can bring the guitar and play on the street—"

"Busking?"

"Yeah, that!" Tommy nodded his head enthusiastically. His voice shook but it carried an underlying hope that left a sinking feeling in the pit of Wilbur's stomach. "And I'll find a job too or something and we'll get a place to stay."

None of it would work. They wouldn't even be gone for 10 minutes before they'd be found again but it was a nice idea – just the two of them, without any uncompassionate authority figures to separate them or send them to a home where each day was a fight to survive, to dodge being hit, to scavage for scraps.

Wilbur wanted to tell him that there wasn't anywhere they could even go that would be safe. Maybe they would *never* be entirely safe, but instead he swallowed loudly and said, "nobody's going to employ a 12 year old."

Tommy just shrugged, unfazed. "I'm tall for my age, I'll say I'm 16."

"School, Tommy," Wilbur shook his head. "You need an education."

Tommy scoffed. "I don't."

“You do,” Wilbur insisted. “I’d never let you drop out, you know that.”

“Fine!” Tommy threw his hands up in exasperation. “You work and I’ll- well, I’ll *think* about school-“

“I couldn’t get us an apartment without a guarantor and absolutely nobody would vouch for us. We’d be living on the streets. Do you have any idea how dangerous that is? What if it’s raining or snowing and you get sick?”

“Not gonna happen,” Tommy returned with far too much confidence. “I don’t get sick.”

“Right but when they find us – and they *will* find us – they’ll split us up for good. There is no way I’d ever see you again after that.”

“Then we won’t let them find us.”

“Tommy-“

“Wil, *please*,” Tommy’s eyes were wet with unshed tears as he looked up at his brother, hands clasped together; begging. “Please I-“ he gasped around a shaky breath. “I’m scared.”

“I know,” Wilbur whispered and pulled Tommy against him again, fearful of his own voice breaking and betraying how afraid he was as well. “I know but you can’t run away, I know it’s hard but you’ll be fine as long as you remember how to keep yourself safe.”

Tommy wrenched himself free to stare back at his brother in disbelief. “You won’t even try to run with me?”

“No,” Wilbur forced the word out.

“Please, Wilbur-“

“No.” He shook his head. “It won’t work.”

“So that’s it then?” Tommy’s tone was accusatory, he looked at Wilbur as if he had betrayed him, as if he could no longer be trusted. “You just stand there while I get dragged out into the middle of nowhere by some asshole and his sadist son?”

“What choice do I *have* Tommy?” Wilbur yelled back at him, his composure finally shattered and baring the anger, desperation and overwhelming fear he had tried so hard to hide. “You think I want this? That it was *my* idea?”

“Of course not but you’re not even willing to try and stop it,” Tommy bit back and then turned away, his shoulders stooped as he stared at the ground.

“If I could then I would have a long time ago,” Wilbur said quietly, recovering from his initial outburst.

“We can still run...” God, Tommy’s voice was almost hopeful and Wilbur could barely take it anymore. “Just, I don’t know, fuck off somewhere...”

Wilbur swallowed around the lump in his throat and picked up Tommy's bag. He held open the door and gestured to it.

"Time to go, Tommy."

"Wil?" The kid just stared back in horror as if Wilbur had struck him.

"Before they come looking for us."

Tommy's face twisted up into a vicious snarl as he stalked towards him and for a moment Wilbur thought the kid was about to hit him.

"You're a *bitch*." The words weren't loud but they were vicious and Wilbur felt them as though they had cut through skin. "You fucking *coward*."

Wilbur schooled his face into something impassive, a performative coldness so as to avoid losing his grip on his emotions again. He gestured to the door once more.

"I'll walk you downstairs."

They walked in uncomfortable silence, Tommy's entire body tense and head hung low as he stared intensely at the floor. Wilbur didn't even say anything when they reached their care worker's door, when he knocked and then pushed it open to usher Tommy inside.

"I think we're all good to go now," Wilbur said to his care worker and then passed the bag into Tommy's hands before pulling the kid close to hug him tight one last time.

He hoped it would tell him everything Wilbur couldn't say out loud.

*I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. Please be safe for me. I love you.*

Tommy didn't return the gesture. He stood straight and refused to even acknowledge Wilbur standing there.

Wilbur didn't wait for him to. He kept the hug brief, one tight squeeze then he let go, aware of the 3 pairs of eyes on him and his brother.

"Be good," he muttered into Tommy's hair and pulled away. It wasn't what he really wanted his last words to be but it would have to do.

Wilbur forced himself to back up some more and turn towards the door, he had one hand on the handle when he heard a voice call out to him.

"Um, Wilbur," he froze and turned to look over his shoulder at Phil. "I know this is a bit sudden but there's room at home for one more if you would like to come with us."

*What?*

Wilbur blinked. He couldn't have heard that right, he just couldn't have-

Tommy was going on his own, there aren't many foster families willing to take in biological siblings, let alone whatever Wilbur and Tommy even were at this point.

He couldn't breathe. His voice died in his throat.

There had to be some catch, some caveat Wilbur wasn't seeing. Maybe he had misheard the man. That was the only explanation. Either that or some cruel trick. He would build Wilbur's hopes up only for him to rescind the offer as soon as he showed interest.

Wilbur had learned long ago that the last good thing that had happened to him was Tommy and that if an offer seemed too good to be true, it likely was.

Wilbur was not an idiot. He was not gullible. He was pragmatic, a realist and knew these kinds of things didn't happen – especially not to him of all people.

Wilbur swallowed around the tightness in his throat and tried not to seem too desperate when he spoke, even though his voice sounded pitiful in his own ears. "Are you saying that you'd foster me too?"

He braced himself, waited for Phil to change his mind, pause as if he were actually considering it for a moment but instead the man just smiled back at him easily. "Yeah, if you're up for it. I have another bedroom and I don't want to split you and Tommy up if I can help it."

"That's—" He heard his own voice break but carried on, overwhelmed but grateful, so unbelievably grateful. "I- um, sorry – that's really generous." *Manners*, the voice in his head hissed, *he can take the offer away just as quickly as he had made it. It's not too late for him to change his mind if you don't behave.* "I'd love—"

Wilbur was caught off guard by Tommy shouting. He turned to his brother only to find the kid jumping for him and grinning as he pulled Wilbur into a hug.

"Seriously?" Tommy turned to Phil. "You being serious right now?"

Wilbur winced. It wasn't exactly a good idea to question a foster parent's decision, he hoped Phil would let it slide just this once but he looked over to find the man laughing softly. It didn't seem mocking or malicious in any way and Wilbur was careful to keep the look of surprise from his face.

Phil nodded and spoke firmly. "I am."

Tommy was saying something but Wilbur couldn't make out the words, still reeling from how quickly things around him were moving.

"Am I going now?" Wilbur asked and glanced between Phil and his social worker, barely breathing.

"If that's okay with Phil?" She replied and Wilbur turned to his prospective foster father, eyes wide and pleading but it seemed that Phil didn't need much convincing.

“Yeah that’s no problem, unless you want more time to pack and get ready?”

“No, no I’m good.” Wilbur said in a rush. “Can I just grab some stuff really quick?”

“Yeah, sure, take your time.”

Wilbur dipped his head in thanks and slipped out the door, Tommy at his heels. He shut the door with a click, took a second to calm himself down and turned to Tommy.

He huffed a laugh of disbelief and then once he started he couldn’t stop. He grinned at Tommy, relief and excitement and tentative hope hit him all at once. “*Holy shit.*”

“You’re coming with me!” Tommy yelled and bounced around him, unable to keep still.

“I’m coming with you,” Wilbur tried the words out for himself. They still didn’t seem real.

“I didn’t- I didn’t think that-“

“I know. We were lucky.” Wilbur hesitated, replaying the days events over and over on loop in his head, from losing Tommy to getting him back again. “We were *so* lucky.”

“What now?” Tommy asked, head tilted in question.

“Well, we should probably pack my shit.” Wilbur straightened and glanced over his shoulder at the door to his social worker’s office. “Quickly before Phil loses his patience and leaves me here.”

The words were light-hearted but there was a very real, very scary threat behind them. If Wilbur took too long, Phil could just decide to take him a different day – if he followed through on his word to take them both at all – and Wilbur did not want Tommy having to survive in a new place on his own when Wilbur had the opportunity to be there with him. Especially not with the way Techno stared at Tommy, eyes dark and strong arms folded across his chest, like he had decided that he despised the kid already. And maybe he did but Wilbur and Tommy had never exactly been popular for the right reasons and were used to some level of resentment from peers and foster siblings.

Besides, Wilbur didn’t need Techno to like Tommy, all he needed was for Techno to leave his little bother unharmed.

“On it.” Tommy nodded and sprinted up the stairs, Wilbur close behind him.

They reached the bedroom and immediately began pulling Wilbur’s clothes from the wardrobe and tossing them onto one of the beds in a large pile. Fortunately, Wilbur didn’t have much in terms of personal belongings, which made packing on short notice a much easier job than it might have been under different circumstances. He did have, however, one thing that he would never leave behind.

“How are we gonna take that without Phil seeing?”

Wilbur sighed and looked down at his guitar. It was the most precious thing he owned, a gift from Tommy that Wilbur cherished and adored.

He couldn't go without it, but he wasn't sure he could leave *with* it either.

No matter what, he had to decide quickly. Phil wouldn't give Wilbur the whole day to gather his things.

"I have no idea," Wilbur sighed, his hand tightening around the neck of the guitar as he looked down at it worried.

"What about your case? It'll fit if you pack it at an angle," Tommy pushed Wilbur's black suitcase across the floor to him.

"I wouldn't be able to take any clothes with me," Wilbur grimaced at the thought. It would be pretty unpleasant to have to wear the same thing every day but he'd tolerate it if it meant that he could bring his guitar.

"Here," Tommy dropped his duffle bag unceremoniously and unzipped it. "Pass some of them to me, there's some room in here."

"This isn't a good plan," Wilbur noted but did as Tommy said. "What happens if Phil searches the bag and finds you carrying my stuff too? He'll know right away that I'll have stuff I'm not supposed to."

Tommy just shrugged and continued to squeeze Wilbur's things in alongside his own. "If he searches our bags then he'll see your guitar anyway. This is better than you walking out with it across your back."

Wilbur bit back a futile whine. The thought of Phil finding his guitar was terrifying but Tommy was right. They had to take their chances sneaking it in and just hope Phil didn't insist on searching their bags.

Some foster families had insisted on looking through their things in case they intended to smuggle alcohol, or drugs or stolen goods into their homes. It was also a good opportunity to confiscate anything that they deemed 'inappropriate', which, in the past, had been their stash of food, money and different articles of clothing that looked 'too shabby' or 'not smart enough', which certain families worried would affect their image.

Wilbur's guitar was always a matter of contention. Sometimes families allowed Wilbur to hang on to it if he kept the guitar out of sight and promised to be quiet, others would snatch it off him right away and Wilbur would either have to beg for it back at the end of a placement or steal it when they weren't looking.

Worst of all had been the time when Wilbur had gotten in trouble at school and arrived home to find his foster family threatening to sell it if he didn't behave. Throughout the rest of the placement, Wilbur didn't remember relaxing once, always on edge, striving to be perfect, not set a foot out of line, behave – give them no reason to follow through on their punishment.

Fortunately, it was returned to Wilbur at the end of his stay and though he wasn't sure if their threat was ever real, he wasn't prepared to take the risk.

"It's not exactly well-protected," Wilbur adjusted the guitar resting in the black suitcase. He couldn't find a way to position it so that it couldn't get jostled too much when he zipped it up and Wilbur didn't think that Phil and Techno would be particularly careful with their belongings.

"Got anything to put around it? Pillows and shit?"

"Probably can't get away with stealing the pillows," Wilbur looked to the bed. "Might be able to take a few pillow cases from the linen cupboard if we're careful about it."

Tommy nodded and cracked the bedroom door slightly to peek outside.

"We good?" Wilbur called over to him and tried to hide how nervous he felt. A part of him expected to find their care worker or Phil standing there to drag them out for taking so long.

"I think so," Tommy took a step out onto the landing. "I'll be right back."

"Be careful."

Tommy shrugged it off. "I always am."

Wilbur couldn't help but worry anyway and sure enough, no more than 30 seconds since Tommy had left the room, Wilbur heard a poorly suppressed shout. His head whipped towards the door but before he could push himself up Tommy had reappeared, a bundle of fabric in his arms. He dropped it unceremoniously but Wilbur looked him up and down anyway, checking to make sure he was uninjured. Once satisfied, he levelled Tommy a stern look and spoke under his breath.

"What was *that*?"

The kid just rolled his eyes and got to work stuffing the gathered material around Wilbur's guitar. "Nothing. Some little shits saw me taking from the cupboard – threatened to snitch on me."

"Fuck, okay, we need to hurry."

Tommy nodded in response and they worked quickly on packing Wilbur's guitar. In the end, they had to use some t-shirts they had packed in Tommy's bag to fill out the gaps and once the instrument was secured, Wilbur zipped the case up and stood it on its wheels.

"Ready?" Wilbur asked and as soon as Tommy bobbed his head in confirmation, he eased the door open, checked that the kids who had bothered Tommy weren't waiting for them and then made his way down the stairs.

It was Tommy who swung the office door open before Wilbur could even remind him to knock and they shuffled into the room together.

Phil looked up from a clipboard and smiled to him. Wilbur felt his breath hitch, realised that it was *his* paperwork. He was still leaving with Tommy. Phil hadn't changed his mind – *yet*, Wilbur told himself, *there is still time for you to mess this up. Don't get complacent.*

It was only another minute of chatter until Phil handed their care worker the completed paperwork back and she told him to get in touch if there were any problems.

Wilbur felt himself tense as the words left her mouth. He knew what she meant when she mentioned 'problems'. She expected Phil to return them, that much was obvious but Wilbur would be good and he would be careful. He would do everything in his power to make this work for himself and Tommy.

"You guys ready?" Phil said at last.

"Yeah," Wilbur spoke up so that Tommy wouldn't have to and he watched carefully as Phil looked down at his son.

Techno just scowled and Wilbur felt himself bristle instinctively. So far Techno seemed like the one who would give him and Tommy the most trouble.

Phil was terrifying in the same way all new foster parents were before Wilbur could get a good read on them. The fact that he seemed so insistent on appearing kind and gentle was already giving Wilbur more than enough to work with. He had seen this type of foster parent before, all smiles in public but cold and cruel behind closed doors if you set a foot out of line. They tended to be good actors but Wilbur was better. Phil wasn't fooling him at all.

Techno, on the other hand, seemed much less subtle in his resentment for Wilbur and Tommy. He stood when his father did and held his entire body upright, tense and tight like a coil ready to spring for them at any moment. His eyes narrowed behind the lenses of his glasses and Wilbur could feel the glare Techno levelled at both himself and Tommy as if it were a physical force. A hand around his throat. A vague warning or threat of sorts Wilbur couldn't quite understand.

It didn't matter. What *did* matter was that Wilbur was ready when the kid finally snapped. He'd have Tommy tucked away under a bed somewhere, quiet and safe while Wilbur took the brunt of Techno's anger.

Phil turned to his son and Techno looked up to meet his eyes. Wilbur couldn't help the relief that washed over him when Techno averted his gaze. He noticed Phil smile slightly at Techno and it seemed to say something the man couldn't voice aloud.

"Right then," Phil said. "Let's go."

Phil made his way out into the hallway and Techno followed close behind. Wilbur kept himself in-between Techno and Tommy. It was unlikely Techno would hurt them in public but Wilbur wasn't about to take any risks. The sooner Techno understood the message that Tommy was off-limits – that Wilbur would always be there as his shield – the better.

Phil glanced back over his shoulder at them and for a moment too long his eyes rested on Wilbur's black suitcase.

It was as if he already knew what was inside it even though Wilbur knew that he couldn't. *There was no way he'd know.*

Despite his attempts to reassure himself, Wilbur's hands tightened around the cases handle and he awkwardly shuffled back, felt himself bump against Tommy.

Then Phil turned back around again and they were walking towards the front door.

Panic didn't leave Wilbur all at once and even after the immediate danger seemed to pass, Wilbur's hands still shook with adrenaline and he found the noises of the group home to be much louder in his ears. He couldn't let it bother him now. Not now. Not when he was finally leaving. He made himself walk, one foot then the other.

"Are you okay?" Tommy whispered to him and despite the screaming of other children as they played in the adjacent rooms, Wilbur could hear him clearly.

"Fine," Wilbur replied simply, then after a moment of silence, he turned to look down at Tommy. "Are you nervous?"

Tommy took a breath, held it for a moment, then released it in a rush of air. He squared his shoulders, fixed his posture and held his chin high as if to radiate a composure he certainly didn't feel. "Not anymore."

If Wilbur didn't know him so well he may have been inclined to believe it.

"Good," Wilbur muttered as to avoid drawing Techno or Phil's attention. He blinked down at Tommy, a subtle smile pulling at the corner of his lips. "You don't need to be when I'm here."

Tommy snorted and rolled his eyes but seemed to relax slightly at Wilbur's words.

They made their way outdoors and the chill hit Wilbur harder than he expected it to. His coat was already squashed inside Tommy's duffel bag and it wasn't worth fumbling around to retrieve it. Phil had parked nearby and Wilbur didn't want to take his eyes off the new foster family for even a moment.

Techno didn't look back when they reached Phil's car. He just clambered into the front passenger seat and slammed the door behind him. Wilbur was slightly ashamed to admit that the sound made him jump and flinch back, eyes wide as they flitted about trying to figure out if he and Tommy were in immediate danger or not.

Phil didn't notice Wilbur's panic but Tommy did. Wilbur felt his brother nudge him slightly, with one bony elbow. Wilbur glanced down and though the kid's face gave nothing away, Wilbur could read the action as if it had been written down for him in ink. *We're okay.*

Then the moment had passed and Wilbur's eyes were back on Phil as he moved around to the back of the car where Wilbur and Tommy stood together awkwardly, awaiting further

instructions.

Wilbur watched as Phil opened the door to the boot. It was largely empty aside for a few reusable shopping bags and a first aid kit. It looked like a good one too, Wilbur noted. It was small and compact and made from a lightweight waterproof fabric he recognised from various expensive outdoors coats – too good for Wilbur and Tommy – but he had seen plenty of foster siblings run off to school trips in them. If things got really bad, Wilbur might be able to sneak out one night and swipe it when Techno and Phil go to sleep.

“You can put your bags in the boot, it might give you both a bit more leg room.”

Wilbur swallowed around the lump in his throat and forced himself to nod. It sounded like a suggestion but Wilbur knew better. He recognised an order when he heard one. “Sure.”

Though he didn’t like leaving his guitar where he wasn’t able to easily reach it, talking back to a foster father would undoubtedly be worse. Wilbur bit down on his lower lip but complied without complaint. He made it seem easy as he hefted the case up and slid it into place before shuffling back and nodding to Tommy.

His little brother had more of an issue parting with the duffle bag. Wilbur could understand. It was precious. It was their clothes, their stash of food and emergency medical supplies. There was no guarantee Phil would let them have their bags back as soon as they reached the house, or that he wouldn’t want to look through them first and losing access to the collection of supplies they had risked so much to gather over the past months would leave them in a scary position.

Wilbur forced himself to relax, to let his shoulders sink and smile encouragingly at Tommy.

*Come on, Tommy, don’t be difficult. Give it up.*

The kid’s brows kit together. He didn’t return Wilbur’s smile.

*You can’t be serious.*

Wilbur merely nodded. A subtle bob of the head.

*I am.*

With some hesitation, Tommy set his bag down beside Wilbur’s and watched mournfully as Phil shut the boot tightly.

Phil then opened a side door for them and Wilbur pushed Tommy in first before following suit himself.

Phil tried making conversation throughout the drive home and though it was obvious to Wilbur that Techno had no intention of joining in, his dad wouldn’t let up.

Phil then turned his attention to Wilbur and Tommy, and as much as Wilbur dreaded being interrogated by the families that took them in, Phil’s questions were never particularly intrusive.

Wilbur had dealt with foster families that felt entitled to his life story before they'd let him under their roof, like he was some sort of threat. It had all felt painfully humiliating but Wilbur knew lying was a risk and rarely one worth taking.

Phil, however, stuck to mundane topics, like the TV shows Wilbur enjoyed or what books he preferred to read. They were safe questions, the sort that couldn't really be used to hurt him later and though Wilbur waited for the other foot to drop – for Phil to sneak in an innocuous question about the few mentions of disruptive behaviour on his record, it never happened.

Phil even tried striking up conversation with Tommy to no avail. The kid was usually rather happy to talk but Wilbur took one quick look at him to know that his brother was preoccupied with somethings and though the worry gnawed at him, he couldn't risk leaning over to ask if Tommy was okay until he was sure Phil didn't have his eyes on them.

Tommy curled in on himself, his right leg bounced up and down, as his eyes glanced about, resting briefly on Wilbur, then Phil, then Techno and then out the window only for the cycle to repeat again. He was undoubtedly nervous but Wilbur couldn't figure out exactly was it was that had got to him since climbing into Phil's car.

Though Wilbur couldn't tell quite how long he and Tommy were stuck there, it must have been a while. He made sure to pay attention to every word Phil said, considering them carefully, and listening out for a slight shift in tone or which words he placed emphasis on – hoping for any little tells that would signify what sort of foster parent Phil would be, but couldn't find anything out of the ordinary, which only worked to scare him more.

Phil held his attention for the most part but Wilbur did make sure to glance out of the window intermittently. It didn't do much good, however, Wilbur had never been this far out of town and wouldn't be able to orient himself. There was a gradual shift from built-up streets, to fewer buildings, until it felt like it had been at least 20 minutes since Wilbur had actually seen one at all, finding only rows and rows of trees and hedges that stood either side of the road.

The further Phil drove, the more helpless Wilbur began to feel about their whole situation. Techno made no secret about wanting to hurt them – the way he held himself was nothing but aggressive and with nowhere to run, Wilbur resigned himself to having to deal with the kid himself. He really hoped Phil would let them keep their bags, Wilbur dreaded to think how he'd manage without their little first aid kit.

Eventually, Phil pulled into the driveway of a relatively large house that looked to be two storeys tall. It was positioned in a large clearing, with trees surrounding it in almost every direction.

Phil announced that they had arrived and shut off the car before beginning to make his way towards the front door, fumbling with his house keys as he went.

Wilbur seized the opportunity. He wasn't sure how much privacy he and Tommy would be allowed once inside. He had to be quick.

Wilbur undid his seatbelt and slid across so he was sat against Tommy. The kid seemed to snap out of this own thoughts upon noticing Wilbur leaning close to whisper in his ear.

"We need to go in now. Make sure you keep your head down and stay quiet. I'll do the talking."

Tommy swallowed and nodded his head. He looked uncertain, like he wanted nothing more than to bolt back down the driveway and not stop running until he was out of reach of any and all adults.

Wilbur knew the feeling all too well but he forced himself into composure, smiled reassuringly and shifted his hand so that it covered Tommy's own.

"You'll be fine," Wilbur promised and squeezed his brother's hand. "You don't need to worry, you'll be *fine*."

Tommy took a breath and seemed to relax. Wilbur saw it as his cue to straighten up and join Phil but as he shifted over again he noticed Techno's eyes watching them in the rear-view mirror.

Wilbur stuttered around a surprised gasp and felt his heart race inside his chest.

*Had Techno heard? Was he waiting for Phil to leave so he could threaten them?*

It would be an ideal time to do it. They were all in a small space together and it would take some fumbling with Tommy's seatbelt if they wanted to try running for Phil before Techno's patience ran out and he went to hurt them.

Wilbur sat very still, back straight as he watched Techno with wide eyes, waiting for him to make a move but then, upon noticing Wilbur's eyes on him, Techno just undid his seatbelt and exited the car.

"What was that?" Tommy asked quietly, despite Wilbur being the only other person left.

"I have no idea."

Wilbur set his hand on the door handle, found it shaking slightly and forced himself to press down and open it to step outside. He fought the urge to wrap his arms around himself, as the autumn air shook the treetops around them.

Wilbur noticed Tommy hesitantly making his way round the back of Phil's car to stand at his side and together they glanced up at their new foster family, bickering on the front doorstep.

Tommy then turned his attention to Wilbur. Without saying a word, he was asking if it was safe to approach them and Wilbur forced himself to focus, to read the situation and gauge how they should proceed.

*Would Phil just expect them to follow? Or would that only make him even more angry that they had just expected to waltz on into his home without explicit permission?*

Wilbur was cold and though the inside of Phil's house was intimidating, he would rather take the risk than linger outside any longer than necessary. On the other hand, however, their bags were still in the boot and Phil hadn't said they could just *take* them.

Though, before Wilbur could make his mind up, he noticed Techno spin around and trudge back over to them. His footsteps were heavy and crunched over the gravel, he scowled at Wilbur and Tommy as he passed by. Wilbur straightened, on guard and body tensed but otherwise didn't move.

Techno said nothing and instead popped open the boot. The kid reached in for one of their bags. Wilbur felt his heart lurch inside his chest. His guitar was barely protected inside the black suitcase and Techno manhandling it too much would run the risk of breaking it, however, if he reached for Tommy's duffle, he would be holding onto their clothes, food stash and medical supplies. Wilbur figured there wasn't really a scenario where he and Tommy came out on top and as he looked down to make sure his little brother was okay, Wilbur noticed a blur of colour as Tommy bolted towards the back of the car and shoved Techno out of the way.

Wilbur saw him stagger back. He saw the way Techno's brows lifted in surprise then knit together as his expression shifted to that of terrifying, smouldering anger.

Wilbur couldn't breathe. He couldn't move. He looked between Tommy and Techno.

*How had things gone wrong already? They weren't even in the house yet!*

The kid had grabbed his black suitcase – *of course he had* – and was struggling under its size as he lowered it to the ground carefully.

“Are you kiddin’ me?”

“What?”

“You’re really just gonna push right past me?”

Wilbur knew the beginning of a fight when he heard one. Though he knew Tommy thought otherwise from the look of challenge on his face, it was one the kid certainly wouldn't win. Wilbur would never let it get that far.

“You shouldn’t have been in my way.” Tommy replied and Wilbur saw Techno grit his teeth, curl his hands into fists at his side.

Wilbur acted on impulse. He grabbed Tommy by the back of his shirt and hauled him back so that he was out of Techno’s reach. If his new foster brother snapped and actually swung for Tommy, Wilbur needed him to be a safe distance away.

Then he bent down and grabbed his black suitcase with his free hand and passed it to Tommy. They didn't have their supplies but Wilbur's guitar was about as safe as it could be.

He then shifted his attention back to Techno and forced himself to look into Techno's eyes, narrowed behind the lenses of his glasses, his stare was hard and unwavering. Wilbur fought the urge to cower away and forced a smile.

He could do this. He had done it countless times already. Deflect the attention from Tommy, make Techno focus on him, instead.

“Sorry!” Wilbur’s voice was light, unafraid. He made sure it didn’t shake when he spoke. *Give nothing away. If Techno sees a crack in the confident façade, he’ll know that they are afraid of him.* “I asked him to grab the bags – that one’s on me.”

Techno just stared at him for a moment and Wilbur held his breath, unsure if it was enough for Techno to back down or if he was still talking himself into hitting them. Instead, however, his hands uncurled and he reached for the duffle bag.

Wilbur clutched tight to the back of Tommy’s shirt. He couldn’t have a repeat of before, they were already on thin ice.

Techno pulled the bag from the boot and held it out to Wilbur without another word. It felt like a trick, like Techno would pull it back before Wilbur’s fingers so much as brushed against it but he held still and waited patiently for Wilbur to take hold of it properly before striding past them and re-joining Phil at the front door.

Wilbur glanced up, noticed Techno and Phil exchange a few hushed words as the kid passed him by and then Phil’s eyes were back on them and Wilbur ducked his head in an effort to pretend he wasn’t trying to listen in. Phil, however, either didn’t notice or didn’t care and let Wilbur and Tommy into his house without saying anything else.

As soon as they stepped past the threshold, Wilbur and Tommy fell into their practiced roles: Tommy memorised the floor plan; Wilbur was on details. Between the both of them they would have a complete map of the place. Tommy would know which rooms lead where and Wilbur would know where the best hiding spots were, where food, medicine and drinks were hidden away as well as what they could probably get away with stealing if their situation got *bad*, for lack of a better word.

The first thing Wilbur noticed about their new house was that it was big. And while big was generally good for hiding and getting about without drawing attention to oneself, Phil’s house seemed so full of little intricacies that Wilbur struggled to take them all in.

There was wooden cabinets, with little pewter crow ornaments sat atop it, alongside a diffuser and a slate grey coaster in one corner, an empty glass abandoned and resting on it. Wilbur looked up, noticed a series of photo frames and hesitated.

They were photos of Techno when he was much younger, sometimes joined by Phil or someone Wilbur didn’t recognise and some were of him on his own. Then, as Wilbur’s eyes followed them along the wall, the pictures seemed more recent until the kid staring back at him awkwardly through the image on the wall looked the same as the one stood a few feet away, arms folded and glaring at Wilbur with intent to kill.

He forced himself to look away. It wasn’t an important detail. Hardly anything useful for him or Tommy later on.

“Okay, so this is the hallway – obviously – you can pop your coats and shoes here when you come in.”

Wilbur jolted at the sound of Phil's voice and locked eyes on him. Phil was smiling but Wilbur knew better than to get distracted. Phil still hadn't dropped the guise of being friendly yet and Wilbur couldn't afford to let himself be distracted. The other shoe would drop at some point, it *had* to.

Phil lead them around the house and to Wilbur's surprise Techno followed close behind. A part of him had expected Phil's son to leave them be as soon as they got home, it was clear he didn't exactly enjoy being around the two foster kids, but having him constantly there – constantly *watching* – was more unnerving than Wilbur was willing to admit.

"And the garage is through there but we never use it." Phil pointed out each room as he went. "The upstairs is just bedrooms and a bathroom," he continued up the stairs with Tommy behind him and Wilbur followed closely behind. Techno brought up the rear and though Wilbur couldn't see him, Techno was a difficult person to ignore, especially when Wilbur could feel the kid's glare on the back of his head as they walked.

The feeling of danger was unmistakeable. It sent a bolt of adrenaline though Wilbur's body urging him to grab Tommy and *run – they weren't safe*. They had to move, had to hide before Techno could hurt them but Wilbur forced the thoughts down into the back of his mind, he could deal with them later.

For now, he had to pretend everything was okay. He took a deep breath and tried to calm down. Techno likely wouldn't make a move until after Phil was gone if the man insisted on keeping up the faux friendliness act, which bought Wilbur and Tommy at least a little bit of time to get their bearings.

Wilbur cast a glance back over his shoulder when he was certain Phil and Tommy were too distracted to notice. Sure enough, Techno stared right back at him, almost in challenge, and Wilbur felt his eyes like ice against his skin. Still, despite the poorly concealed hostility, Techno didn't make a move against him. He didn't mutter a threat or kick Wilbur in the back of the leg. He just stared.

It was more unnerving than it had any right being and Wilbur turned his head back quickly before Techno could see him waver.

"That one's mine and Techno is over there," Phil pointed out two rooms on one side of the hallway. "The bathroom is here and these two are yours."

They came to a stop on the landing and Phil opened two doors either side of each other.

Wilbur had come to not expect much from the bedrooms he was allocated when arriving with a new family. If he didn't have high hopes to begin with, then there was no way to be disappointed when the room he was given had an issue with insulation and kept him awake at night shivering underneath a thin blanket, or when the door didn't close properly and kept swinging open, stripping him of any privacy his own space would give him, or when his foster parents left him with nothing but a bed and nowhere to set his (albeit few) personal belongings.

But the room in front of him was more than Wilbur had been allowed in the past. It was fitted with a bed, desk, dresser and wardrobe and had a large window on the far wall that overlooked the forest that surrounded Phil's house. It lacked a personal touch, but Wilbur found he far preferred it to those houses where they tried to guess at his personality before he arrived on their doorstep. It was almost like a hotel room, clean and plain but still comfortable. Undoubtedly a guest room then, Phil wasn't lying in their care worker's office.

Wilbur peeked over at Tommy's room and found it to be almost the exact same. Even Tommy seemed confused, like he was moments away from turning to Phil and asking where their rooms actually were because there had to be some sort of mistake here but before he could get a word out, Phil broke the silence.

"What do you think?"

He was being serious. Phil *actually* meant for them to stay here.

"They're great," Wilbur forced out quickly in case the man mistook his surprise for him being ungrateful. Wilbur looked over his shoulder, noted where Techno stood before turning his attention to Phil. "Thank you."

Phil smiled. He seemed relieved, which Wilbur figured was probably a good thing. "That's no problem, I'll let you both get settled in and get started on lunch. Did you eat anything before you left?"

"We—" Wilbur glanced over at Tommy, who seemed equally as unsure about how to respond. Tommy had eaten, Wilbur made sure of that before they had even started packing to leave, but he had no idea how strict Phil was with food just yet. It was best to have something now while he was offering than risk waiting and not get anything later on. Wilbur made up his mind. "No, sorry, we didn't."

"That's okay, I'll make enough for all of us then." To Wilbur's relief, Phil didn't seem at all annoyed. "I'll give you guys a shout when it's done."

"Thanks."

Phil smiled to them again before taking his leave and starting down the stairs to work on lunch.

The moment of relief Wilbur felt was quickly replaced by a terrible, smothering sense of fear that Techno was still stood there, unmoving and terrifying.

His eyes flitted over to his new room. They could probably just hide out in there and shove the dresser in front of it if Techno tried to get in.

"What are you looking at, bitch?" Wilbur was dragged from his thoughts by the sound of Tommy's voice. The kid glared up at Techno, lip curled back in a snarl and Wilbur reacted on instinct.

“God- fuck, Tommy- *stop* it,” Wilbur pushed Tommy back into the relative safety of his room and tossed his bag in after him. He loved his little brother dearly but sometimes, Tommy really didn’t know when to stop talking. “Sorry about that, it’s long car rides, he gets tired.” Wilbur smiled apologetically to Techno, hoped it would be enough to deter him from hurting them and backed into the room before Phil’s son had time to react.

Wilbur swung the door shut and breathed a sigh of relief upon realising his room had a thumb turn lock. *An actual lock!* He twisted it quickly and heard the distinct click of metal sliding into place. There was definitely a key for the other side but it wasn’t likely Techno had access to it, probably just Phil but the privacy made Wilbur feel safer than he had in months.

Wilbur turned his head, hand still clutched around the door handle in a white-knuckled grip.

“What was that?” He hissed to Tommy, voice quiet but annoyed.

“What?” Tommy returned the tone. “He was being a prick!”

“Yes but he could *absolutely* hurt us if he wanted to and from the look on his face, it won’t take much convincing.”

Tommy rolled his eyes. “We’re fine, see? We need to let him know now that he’s not going to get away with pushing us around.”

“No, we are not going to test his patience – or Phil’s. We need to keep our heads down, not draw attention to ourselves and we’ll be fine.”

“And that worked out so well for us last time.” The sarcasm in Tommy’s voice dripped like venom and Wilbur felt the words cut deeper than the kid had meant for them to. It only took Tommy a second to realise what he’d said. “I mean- I didn’t… sorry. I know you did everything you could.”

Wilbur sighed and in the temporary safety of his new bedroom, he finally felt like he could catch his breath.

“It’s okay,” he shuffled over to Tommy and drew him into a brief hug. “Don’t think of those other houses. We’ll be fine this time, I’ll make sure of it.”

## End Notes

Here's my [Tumblr](#) if you ever wanna say hi and my [trello](#) for progress updates on all of my fics :D

I post anonymously but to find all of the MCYT fics that I have written, check out this [series](#)!

Lastly, here's the WIP list for upcoming Guitar Strings Wilbur!POV fics people have requested over on Tumblr:

- Gapple scene
- Guitar Strings and Keyrings epilogue (Techno's pov)

Thank you all so much for reading and following this series, your support means the world to me as always :D

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!